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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 005086

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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT REVERSES COURSE ON PROPOSED BAN ON
HUMAN RIGHTS COOPERATION WITH ISRAEL

REF: AMMAN 04953

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for Reasons 1.5 (b),(d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) The Lower House of Parliament voted June 20 to remove a controversial amendment to a human rights law that it had earlier approved which banned cooperation with Israeli organizations and "those who support it." While a strong GOJ lobbying campaign succeeded in swaying the votes of former Prime Minister Rawabdeh and others, 37 MPs continued to back the amendment. End Summary.

THE LOWER HOUSE BACKS DOWN

2. (U) 58 out of 95 MPs present in the Lower House on June 20 voted to retract a controversial amendment to the National Center for Human Rights Law (adopted June 9) which excluded "the Jewish entity and those who support it" from any form of cooperation in the field of human rights (see reftel). Several MPs offered alternatives to the amendment, none of which were accepted, ranging from severing relations with Israeli organizations only to changing the wording from "Jewish entity" to Israel. Current MP and former Prime Minister Abdur Raouf Rawabdeh, who earlier played a pivotal role in pushing through the amendment, was among those who voted against it.

3. (C) The Lower House reversal followed a concerted lobbying effort by the GOJ to retract the amendment. Foreign Minister Muasher and other senior GOJ official told the Ambassador prior to the June 20 vote that they had contacted key MPs, including Rawabdeh, to explain how the amendment had damaged Jordan's image abroad and were confident that they had assembled a majority in the Lower House to remove the offensive language from the law.

COMMENT

4. (C) The fact that the Lower House changed course under GOJ pressure is not surprising given the large number of MPs who are firm government supporters. It is likely that some of those who voted for the amendment earlier would not have done so had they anticipated the strong GOJ reaction, and that of King Abdullah, against it. What is noteworthy is that 37 MPs (20 of whom are not members of the opposition Islamic Action Front) continued to back the amendment, giving the GOJ a comfortable -- but smaller than usual -- majority on a key vote.

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GNEHM